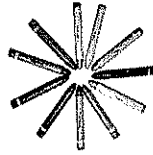


Sheff Movement



Quality Integrated Education for All Children

Good Evening Chairwoman Harp, Chairwoman Walker and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Jessica Leake. I am the Outreach Coordinator for the Sheff Movement coalition and I am here to testify in support of The Governor's Proposed Budget. Specifically, I want to speak on behalf of increasing the per pupil payments to receiving towns in Open Choice.

In my work with the Sheff Movement coalition I have had the opportunity to talk to students, parents and guardians, educators, administrators, and staff in the Open Choice program. All of the interactions I have had with the Choice program make me confident that increasing the amount of money suburban towns receive will improve the Open Choice program by opening additional seats and allowing receiving towns to support incoming students better. The payment receiving towns currently get under Open Choice has not changed in almost 20 years.

Additionally, increasing Open Choice funding in proportion to the rate of a town's participation in the Open Choice program will go a long way to incentivizing towns to increase the number of new seats they offer. Many administrators have indicated that it is not the will to open more seats that is lacking, but the funding. Currently the Open Choice program does not offer nearly as many seats as the magnet schools do. Increasing the funding and incentivizing increased participation will begin to change that.

Finally, increasing payment to receiving towns is a cost effective way for the State of Connecticut to meet the Sheff goals. By more fairly reimbursing receiving Open Choice towns, the State can increase the number of students being educated in an integrated setting. At the same time, we encourage the state's continuing support for magnet school operating funds, as we continue to expand the number of children with access to a quality, integrated education.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you will support the increased funds for Open Choice in the Governor's Proposed Budget.

Sincerely,
Jessica Leake, Outreach Coordinator; Sheff Movement coalition